

The Christian Attitude/The Wordly Attitude

James 4:6-10

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If you have your bibles I invite you to turn with me to James chapter 4. Since James began to talk about heavenly wisdom towards the end of James chapter 3 he has been slowly turning our attention to the issue of worldliness. Worldliness is a tremendous challenge. It's always a challenge for the Christian church, when the church dwells in a peaceful and prosperous setting and is in some measure identified with, and admired by, and takes a leadership role in the culture in which it finds itself. And that means that worldliness is an issue for us in various ways. We ourselves are relatively prosperous. We dwell in the most prosperous nation in the world, in the greatest time of prosperity the last three years, the stock market notwithstanding, ever known in the history of the world, and consequently we are very comfortable. And in that situation of comfort in which we have some say and play in cultural leadership, we are tempted to think like the world, to think in its categories, to agree with its assessment of the world around it, the problems of the world, the possibilities and solutions to the problems of the world, and we are tempted to believe like the world and to want our beliefs to be acceptable in the sight of the world. We're tempted to behave like the world, and if we are not tempted to go whole hog in behaving like the world we at least want to have one foot in both worlds; one foot in the church and one foot in the world, behaving sometimes like a Christian ought to behave, and other times behaving like the world. Worldliness is a problem for us. We begin to want the things that the world offers and to want them inordinately, or to value them in preference to God. We begin to value the things that the world values above the things that God has told us to value in His word. We seek to fill our desires and our satisfaction with temporary things offered by the world rather than by those eternally things offered by God Himself, and so worldliness is a challenge.

Now James knows that and he is talking to Christians in the first century who are facing that same challenge, and in James 4:1-5, he gives a diagnosis of this problem. He says the problem of worldliness is not a problem of you, a Christian being plopped down in an environment which is a temptation. It's a more dire problem than that. The problem of worldliness, James says, is a problem that actually originates in the heart. Yes, it's seen in the world around us, it's seen in, for instance, he says, in broken relationships. He says broken relationships, divisions between friends and family, between Christians in local congregation,

he says this can be traced, if you look at verse one of James chapter four, this can be traced in our pursuing the selfish desires of our own hearts. That selfish desire is itself worldly. It shows itself in broken relationships, and therefore worldliness can be evidenced, even in the Christian community. But the problem, you see, is not that Christians have been plopped down in a setting and they've been influenced by that which is outside of them, you see, some of the problems actually well up from their own hearts. So the problem is not just what's out there impinging upon us, it's what's in here, producing at least, in some measure, what's out there. The external broken relationships, he says, are evidences of internal worldliness and he gives the example in verses 2 and 3 of prayer. He says some of you aren't praying, and that in itself shows a problem with your relationship with God, and it shows that you don't see God as the One who is the source of your real needs or you'd be going to Him in prayer. On the other hand, he turns to some who are praying but they are praying for the wrong things, and he says, you're not having your prayers answered because you want the wrong things. You've been impacted by worldliness and so your prayer life is actually an evidence of that worldliness in the way you're conducting it. And then in verses four and five, he talks about how serious this is. James uses strong language, you cannot be a friend of this world and a follower of God, because friendship with this world means hostility with God. It reminds you of his older brother's words, "You can not serve God and mammon." So James makes it very clear this is a dire situation. It's a very important thing to consider. That's the negative side. That's the diagnostic side. So, what do we do, what do you do to combat worldliness, that's what James talks about in the passage we are going to study today. So let's turn to James 4:6-10, and hear God's word:

"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned into mourning and let your joy be turned to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you." Amen

This is God's word. May He write His eternal truth upon our hearts. Lets pray. O Lord, we ask this day in the midst of our uncomfot, in the midst of our own struggles with worldliness, that You would speak to us by Your word. Shake us from our spiritual slumber. Show us our spiritual poverty. Remind us of our spiritual danger and then give us the answer of Your holy word, and by Your grace grant that we would seek the answer and follow in Your ways for the good of our souls and above all for Your glory. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.

So here we are, surrounded by a world, a culture, a community, a peer group, a social network, a *status quo*, that is enticing us to worldliness, and maybe in some of us, many of us, most of us, its prevailing. The world offers its wares, and we like its wares, we'd like to buy some and have them in our own home. The world

offers us its thinking, its belief, its behavior. We like that thinking and belief and behavior to some measure and we want to have some of it in our own life. The world says to us that some of our ways are out of step, and we begin to think, now we do need to be in step with the world, and so we begin to abandon the ways of the Lord and walk in the ways of the world, and we feel this pressure, this pull, this attraction from the world around us. But that's not the only problem. That's the outside situation; on the inside we're being tugged in that same direction by our own selfish desires. We're fighting a two front war. It's not just that out there which is waging a war against our hearts, there is a division in our own hearts, there's a worldliness resident in our own hearts that's tugging us in the direction of the world.

How in the world do you combat that? How can you hope to prevail when the enemy is not simply without, the enemy is within. You see, some people would suggest that you need to look within to find the answer. James says that would be futile because the answer isn't within. In part, at least, the problem is within, so how do you combat worldliness?

James gives two simple but brilliant answers to that staggering important question right here in James 4:6-10, and his answers are grace and obedience. Trust and obedience. And I'd like to look at those answers with you this morning.

I. Don't look for resources within to battle your worldliness; Look out and up; Seek Grace.

First of all, in verse six, James makes it very clear that God's grace is the source of our sanctification. God's grace is not only the source of our new birth, God's grace is not only the source of our becoming Christians, God's grace is not only the source of our being justified our being declared to be righteous only for the righteousness of Christ, God's grace is also the source of our growth in grace. God's grace is also the source of our sanctification. God's grace is the source of our ability to be separated from the world, or ability to be consecrated to God. We live in a fallen and sinful world that is in rebellion against Him. God's grace is the source of our sanctification and our victory over worldliness. James makes that very clear in verse six, where he says, "He gives a greater grace, therefore it says God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." You see what James is saying. James is saying, here is the dire picture. James 4:6-10, worldliness is a problem, it's a problem in your heart, it's a problem all around you, it's a dire problem because you can't love God and love the world. You can't be a follower of God and be a follower of the world. You can't be a friend of God and a friend of the world. It's a dire situation. So what do you do? He says, don't look within yourself for the resources to fight this battle, look up and outlook out of yourself. Don't look in yourself. Look up to God, seek His grace.

In other words, James is saying, for heaven's sake don't look within. And that

message is being taught to us everywhere we turn. We're told that the solutions to our problems are to look within and to summon up some dormant principle in us that we simply haven't actualized before. Confidence men are telling us this in infomercials all the time, whether they're a half hour, an hour, whether they're selling products that will grow you hair or whether they're telling you how to be a better salesman or a better whatever else, constantly we are being told that the answer to our facing the challenges of today is to look within, awaken the giant within you, actualize all the talents and potentials which lie within you which have been dormant and have not been exercised to their fullness. If you look within you will find the answer.

And you know, there is a spiritual equivalent to this message. Turn on the television or the radio, and six times out of ten the spiritual message that you will hear is the equivalent of that message. It substitutes the 'word faith' for the word 'will power' or 'self-confidence' or 'awaken the giant within you' but it is teaching the same message. You see, faith preachers, that is those preachers who preach that the answer to our problems is only to believe more and then we'll get everything we want, we'll have more health, we'll have more wealth, we'll have more happiness, and if we don't have those things it's because we haven't believed enough, and if we would only believe more we'll have all those things because God does not want us not to have those things, He wants us to have those things, but we can only have those things if we believe more, these 'faith preachers' preach faith in the same way confidence men preach the power within. And in that way faith becomes the spiritual equivalent of will power. Just believe harder and you'll have all your answers to all your problems, and if you have problems it's because you are not believing hard enough. And James is emphatically not giving that answer to this battle here. James is emphatically not saying to you to rely on your willpower here.

I was having a conversation with a dear friend on Friday and she said to me, "You know, if will power worked I'd be a size six." Another friend that same day, in an unrelated conversation, and I didn't provoke this it just came out in the course of the conversation, said, "Willpower is like using a squirt gun to put out a forest fire." See, James is not saying that the answer is within you. This is not Obi-Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker, "Look within you, Luke." You know this is not this is not the force, the answer is not within you. James asserts here, that in spite of the monumental nature of the challenge there is an answer, but that answer is not in you. It's outside of you, you look out, and you look up, it's with God, it's with His grace, he says.

And revel in this for a minute, friends, bath in this for a minute. He says that God gives a greater grace. He piles up an enormous challenge, that challenge of worldliness. It's within you, it's around you, it's everywhere, you're struggling with it every minute of every day of every week of every month of every year, and he says, God gives greater grace. I know your circumstances are hard. He gives greater grace than that. I know that the temptations are profound. He gives

greater grace than that. I know that the challenge is unimaginable. He gives greater grace than that. We're in a mess but He gives more grace than the mess. We are weak but He gives more grace than our weakness. We are tired but God is tirelessly on our side, He is never less than sufficient, He always has more to give. We may be beaten but He is never beaten. And we may even in our sinful frustration claim against Him that He has not given us enough, and He simply replies then, "Child, I'll give you more." He is ready to give grace and His grace is greater not only than all our sins, but all the challenges and temptations that face us day by day. And James is saying that we must look to God for fresh and greater aid, not within, but look to God. We must renew our siege of the kingdom of grace by prayer, we must acknowledge our poverty and need, and like that unfortunate widow, pound on the unjust judge's door until the blessings come down, and until we are humbled to that point, until we are looking only to His grace we are not yet in the position to grow and conquer.

Isn't it interesting to you that God has so ordained that all the great strides of our sanctification all the great movements forward in our growing into conformity to the image of His Son, all of our becoming more holy, all of our becoming more sanctified, more holy, more God-like in our moral qualities, begins with our relearning the first principles of our justification. In justification we learned that we couldn't save ourselves, but that His grace was sufficient and in every great step of sanctification we relearn that truth, that His grace is sufficient and that His power is perfected in our weakness. So the first step to fighting worldliness is acknowledge that you do not have the resources to fight worldliness and that only God can provide those resources, but that His resources are so magnificent that they overshadow any weapon that the enemy can bring to bear against you from without or within. God's grace is greater, but it's God's grace, it's not your strength. That's where the war against worldliness begins, with recognizing that you are weaponless except for the provision of God, but that God's weapons are so much more powerful than the weaponry of the world that they are beyond compare. That's where this battle begins. You don't look for resources within you to battle your worldliness, you look out, and you look up, you see grace, you trust God to be true to His word, and you rely on His grace. That's where it begins.

II. Don't think that relying on grace means passivity or inactivity; no, walk in obedience to grace.

That's the first thing that James says, but James isn't done, James doesn't just have an answer to you that says 'believe something,' 'trust in God,' 'do nothing else,' 'let go and let God.' That's not James' answer. James' answer has both a passive side and an active side. Yes, you have to admit that you don't have the resources in yourself and that only God has those resources and only He can give those resources, and that those resources are more than sufficient to answer the need of the day, but there is something else you need to do as well, and James spells that out in verses seven through ten. We can sum it up in

the word “obey.”

You see our obedience is the proper response to God's grace, and it's not only the proper response to God's grace, it's the tool that God's grace uses in our lives, it's the instrument of God's grace. Don't think that relying on God's grace means passivity. Don't think that relying on God's grace means that you are inactive. No, you walk in obedience to grace.

Have you counted up the commands in verses seven through ten? There may be ten commands in verses seven through ten. First, look to God for grace, He gives a greater grace. But then ten commands, submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, be miserable, mourn, weep, let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom, humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you. Alec Motyer says this, “In verses seven through ten there are no less than ten commands to obey. James does not see the indwelling Spirit as a means of instant and effortless sanctification.” You know sort of the Holy Spirit microwave, just pop it in and thirty seconds it's done, that's not how sanctification works. It's not easy, it's not effortless. He goes on to say, “In the same way that James does not see the inexhaustible supply of God's grace as sweeping us along to an effortless holiness, he knows of no such easy victory. The God who says, ‘Here is my grace to receive,’ says in the same breath, ‘Here are My commands to obey.’”

And James in the midst of these ten commands gives four great directives, and I would like you to look those directives with me. Trust in God's grace and then walk in these ways, he says. What are they? Fight, Fellowship, Focus, Forgiveness. Forgive the alliteration, but maybe it will help you remember. Fight, fellowship, focus, forgiveness. Fight in verse seven. Fellowship in the first part of verse eight. Focus in the second part of verse eight. Forgiveness in verses nine and ten. Look at them with me.

Two key commands are given in verse seven; submit to God, resist the devil. That language is military language. You may misunderstand it. Submission sounds like you are sort of relinquishing, you're giving up, you're saying ‘uncle,’ but the fact of the matter is, *submit* here means *active allegiance*, active allegiance to God. It doesn't mean passivity; it's enlistment language, it means being ready to do the Lord's bidding. Have you heard Ric Cannada tell that wonderful story of Sam Patterson in the early days of RTS when they were facing a tremendous challenge, and they had no idea where they would get money from for students, for buildings, for faculty, for anything, and Sam Patterson stood up at the board meeting and said, “There are only two answers I have, men, there are only two things that I know: God is able and we are willing.” Well, there you have it James 4:6-10 ten summed up: God is able, we are willing.

There's the willing language, you submit to God, you enlist in His army, you be prepared to do His bidding.

Resistance is the other side of that *resistance* means to man the defenses to *be prepared for conflict with Satan*. James is simply reminding you that when grace invades your life the battle is only just beginning, and for some reasons Christians forget that. They think that when grace invades your life that the battle is over, and James is simply saying to you here, you need to be in the mindset that grace is there for the fight, grace is there so that you can pick up the armor, grace is there so that you can get into the fight, into the conflict. It doesn't end it, it begins it, and Christians need to remember that.

I have Christians coming into the office all the time, and they are confused because they are in the midst of a fight, and I have to say, "Excuse me, have we read our New Testaments recently? Of course you're in a fight. That means you've got a heart beat it means you've got a spiritual heartbeat." I'm encouraged at this. It's the ones that come into my office without a fight that I worry about. If you got a heartbeat and you're a Christian, you're in a fight, and James is reminding you, submit to God, enlist in His army, and resist the devil. The first principle is *fight*. Can you imagine Erskine Wells on the beach of Guadalcanal calling up his colonel, "Ah, colonel, we've got a problem here." "What's the problem, Erskine?" "Ah, we're in a fight." "Ok, I thought that's what we sent that marine division in for. You were sent in for that." The fight is not the problem, folks, a lack of a fight is a problem, but the fight's not the problem. The fight is evidence that grace is at work, the fight is evidence that you've got a spiritual heartbeat. You don't need to be surprised by the fight. I'm not making fun of the kinds of fight that you come in overwhelmed with. Understand that I'm just saying, don't be surprised when that happens, don't be surprised when the fight is engaged. That's his first principle, be ready for the fight.

Secondly, fellowship. Look at what he says in the first part of verse eight, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. What's James doing? He's calling you to cultivate fellowship with God. What is the thing that you need most for the fight that you are going to be in? God. What is the thing that you need most in order to conquer worldliness? God. You need a relationship with Him, you need Him, you need communion with Him, you need His presence, you need His power, you need His favor. How do you get that? You draw near to God. What's James saying? Draw near to God through the means that He has appointed for you to draw near to Him. What does that mean? It means coming to worship the Lord on His day, week in, week out, year after year, being under the preaching of the word in public worship where the Bible is read and preached and prayed and sung and seen in the sacraments, cultivating every appointed avenue whereby we have fellowship with Him. Look, the skies don't have to part, and the angels don't have to sing, for God's grace to sing. It may be imperceptibly working in you in ways that you have no idea, ways that you cannot comprehend, and James is saying, draw near to God. Fellowship with God isn't a call to go out and have some ecstatic spiritual experience, just draw near to God in those means that He has appointed. So, there's the fight and there's fellowship.

Then, there's focus. I apologize for that word, but I'll explain later look at the end of verse eight that he's clearly talking about the struggle of double-mindedness that exists even within believers. On the one hand we want to follow God, and on the other hand we want to follow after the world, and he says, don't be double-minded sinners, purify yourself. James is calling us here to purify our lives, to do spiritual pruning, to do some spiritual weeding in our garden. He wants us to be focused on God and that means pruning things that detract from that focus.

Isn't it interesting, by the way, that first James we draw near to God and then we prune. He doesn't say, "Get your act together so that you can draw near to God." You can't get your act together unless you've been drawn near to God. You can't ever get your act together. But, it's "Draw near to God" and then work on the pruning. Don't try to fix yourself up enough that you will then be able to draw near to God. Draw near to God and only then will you be able to work on the pruning that needs to be done. James is calling for a thorough purification of our lives. This is what the older Christian would have called *mortification*, killing sin, going after sin in the Christian life.

And then finally, he speaks of forgiveness. Look at verses nine and ten. What does he mean when he says, "Be miserable, mourn, and weep let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom."? Is he saying, Christians shouldn't laugh, Christians shouldn't be happy, Christians shouldn't enjoy life, Christians should never smile, no smiling allowed? No, he's using language of repentance, he's saying, repent. What happens when you see your sin and how it has hurt someone else? You mourn, maybe you weep, your laughter is turned to mourning and your joy to gloom, and he is using the language of repentance.

And you should quickly know that it is in fact grace alone that enables us to do each of these four things, to fight, to fellowship, to focus, and to seek forgiveness through repentance. The fact of these things in our lives is an evidence of God's sanctifying grace at work within us, but isn't it interesting that God has so ordained that all the great strides of our sanctification should proceed with a decisive taking of sides, with a seeking of God, with a longing to be like Him, with a mourning that we're not like Him.

And then, having been brought to the depths, what do we read in verse ten, "Humble yourselves and He will exalt you," so that in sanctification, just as in justification, it is the hour of despair which is on the verge of victory, because it is when we come to the end of ourselves that we find the victory of God over sin and self and the world. That's the battle of worldliness. It is a dire battle. There's no battle that we need to engage more than that battle. May God grant that you use these spiritual weapons, the source God's grace, the weapons, the means, the tools of God's grace, to win that victory over worldliness. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we not only admit our worldliness, we admit our

weakness against our worldliness and we ask for Your grace, and then we ask again for your grace that we would love You, that we would hate the world that we would fight the fight of faith, that we would seek Your fellowship, and above all else that would prune sin in our lives and repent for it with godly sorrow in Jesus' name, amen

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